

A Critical Review and Assessment of Herman and Chomsky's 'Propaganda Model'

■ Jeffery Klaehn

ABSTRACT

■ Mass media play an especially important role in democratic societies. They are presupposed to act as intermediary vehicles that reflect public opinion, respond to public concerns and make the electorate cognizant of state policies, important events and viewpoints. The fundamental principles of democracy depend upon the notion of a reasonably informed electorate. The 'propaganda model' of media operations laid out and applied by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* postulates that elite media interlock with other institutional sectors in ownership, management and social circles, effectively circumscribing their ability to remain analytically detached from other dominant institutional sectors. The model argues that the net result of this is self-censorship without any significant coercion. Media, according to this framework, do not have to be controlled nor does their behaviour have to be patterned, as it is assumed that they are integral actors in class warfare, fully integrated into the institutional framework of society, and act in unison with other ideological sectors, i.e. the academy, to establish, enforce, reinforce and 'police' corporate hegemony. It is not a surprise, then, given the interrelations of the state and corporate capitalism and the 'ideological network', that the propaganda model has been dismissed as a 'conspiracy theory' and condemned for its 'overly deterministic' view of media behaviour. It is generally excluded from scholarly debates on patterns of media behaviour. This article provides a critical assessment and review of Herman and Chomsky's propaganda

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model and seeks to encourage scholarly debate regarding the relationship between corporate power and ideology. Highly descriptive in nature, the article is concerned with the question of whether media can be seen to play a hegemonic role in society oriented towards legitimization, political accommodation and ideological management. ■

Key Words Chomsky, communication studies, ideology, hegemony, media, media studies, social control, power, propaganda model

Introduction

The 'propaganda model' of media operations (henceforth PM) laid out and applied by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* avows to the view that the mass media are instruments of power that 'mobilize support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: xi). The model argues that media function as central mechanisms of propaganda in the capitalist democracies and suggests that class interests have 'multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 2). Media, according to this framework, do not have to be controlled nor does their behaviour have to be patterned, as it is assumed that they are integral actors in class warfare, fully integrated into the institutional framework, and act in unison with other ideological sectors, i.e. the academy, to establish, enforce, reinforce and police corporate hegemony.¹

At least two commentators have referred to the PM as 'an almost conspiratorial view of the media' (Holsti and Rosenau, n.d.: 174). Herman and Chomsky (1988: xii) respond to this, stressing that the PM actually constitutes a '*free market analysis*' of media, 'with the results largely an outcome of the working of market forces'.

With equal logic, one could argue that an analyst of General Motors who concludes that its managers try to maximize profits (instead of selflessly labouring to satisfy the needs of the public) is adopting a conspiracy theory. (Chomsky, 1982: 94)

The term 'conspiracy theory' implies secret controls that operate outside normal institutional channels. Herman and Chomsky's PM explains media behaviour in terms of institutional imperatives (see Rai, 1995: 42).²

One can infer that there are three reasons why Herman and Chomsky violently reject the 'conspiracy' label. First, the term itself, 'conspiracy theory', is *precisely that*, a *label*, one that has been used as a

means of dismissing the PM without granting a minimal presentation of the model or a consideration of evidence.³ Second, Herman and Chomsky acknowledge that deliberate intent is in fact sometimes an intervening factor which can have intended and/or unintended outcomes, depending upon the specific case (see Herman, 1996a). The PM's own emphasis, however, is on patterns of media behaviour, in relation to institutional imperatives. The model itself assumes that patterns of media behaviour should be explained in structural terms, and not assume conspiracy. Third, Herman and Chomsky can be seen to presume that there are at least five major 'filtering' mechanisms which structure news content.⁴ The authors also presume that deliberate intent ('conspiracy') and unconscious hegemony ('professional ideology') are for the most part unknowable and unmeasurable. Herman (2000) stresses that 'intent is an unmeasurable red herring'. Moreover, Chomsky writes that,

The term 'conspiracy theory' is particularly revealing. I've always explicitly and forcefully opposed 'conspiracy theories,' and even am well known for that. . . . My work (and Ed Herman's, and others') is about as much of a 'conspiracy theory' as a study of GM that suggests that its management seeks to maximize profit and market share. But to the intellectual classes, to suggest that institutional factors enter into policy is like waving a red flag in front of a bull – for very good reasons.⁵

The PM can be seen to imply intent, and while it is not concerned with intervening processes, there is a vast scholarly literature specifically devoted to theorizing about the values, motivations and outlooks of individual editors, reporters and media commentators.⁶ Herman and Chomsky postulate that the filter constraints have powerful unilinear effects, such that media 'interests' and 'choices' serve class interests on a consistent basis.

Herman and Chomsky (1988: 304) concede that the PM cannot account 'for every detail of such a complex matter as the working of the national mass media'. The authors acknowledge that several secondary effects are left unanalysed and cede that the PM is not concerned to analyse practical, organizational or mundane aspects of newsroom work.⁷ At the same time, however, critics charge that the PM's overall view of media behaviour is in general deterministic and can be seen to be plagued by sociological reductionism.⁸ The phrase 'manufacturing consent' encapsulates a functionalist logic. Herman (2000) has replied to both criticisms, declaring that, 'Any model involves deterministic elements' and, to those who have condemned the PM for presuming functional necessity, noting that while the PM explains patterns of media behaviour in terms of 'mechanisms and policies whereby the powerful protect their

interests naturally and without overt conspiracy'.⁹ Elsewhere, Chomsky writes that,

The propaganda model does not assert that the media parrot the line of the current state managers in the manner of a totalitarian regime; rather, that the media reflect the consensus of powerful elites of the state-corporate nexus generally, including those who object to some aspect of government policy, typically on tactical grounds. The model argues, from its foundations, that the media will protect the interests of the powerful, not that it will protect state managers from their criticisms; the persistent failure to see this point may reflect more general illusions about our democratic system. (Chomsky, 1989: 149)

The PM *is* to be distinguished from the 'gate-keeper model' of media operations. The PM does not assume that news workers and editors are typically coerced or instructed to omit certain voices and accentuate others. Rather, the model outlines circumstances under which media will be relatively 'open' or 'closed' (see Herman, 2000).¹⁰ Whereas the PM is an 'institutional critique' of media performance (see Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 34), the gate-keeper model is principally concerned with micro-analysis and focuses on how decisions of particular editors and journalists influence news production and news selection processes (see White, 1964; Carter, 1958).

The kind of micro-analyses is not the task of the Propaganda Model. The model provides an overview of the system at work, making sense out of a confusing picture by extracting the main principles of the system. (Rai, 1995: 46)

Ericson et al. (1989: 378) point out that the instrumentalist underpinnings of the gate-keeper model are empirically unspecifiable due to 'variation in who controls the process, depending on the [particular] context, the types of sources involved, the type of news organizations involved, and what is at issue'. Thus, the gate-keeper model of media operations is generally regarded as overly simplistic (Cohen and Young, 1973: 19).¹¹ The PM acknowledges that journalists and editors do play central roles in disseminating information and mobilizing media audiences in support of the special interest groups that dominate the state and private economy. But the PM assumes that the processes of control are often unconscious. Its basic argument in this context is that meanings are essentially '*filtered*' by the constraints that are built into the system. Herman and Chomsky (1988: 2) argue that meanings are formed and produced at an unconscious level, such that conscious decisions are typically understood to be natural, objective, commonsense.¹²

The elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents that results from the operation of these filters occurs so naturally that media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news 'objectively' and on the basis of professional news values. (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 2)

The PM does not assume that newsroom workers routinely make conscious decisions to align themselves with the interests of dominant elites.¹³ Rather, it assumes that elite media recruit right-minded personnel to fill staff positions. Its overarching concern with the broader issue of social class firmly distinguishes the PM from the gate-keeper model.

Those who choose to conform, hence to remain within the system, will soon find that they internalize the beliefs and attitudes that they express and that shape their work; it is a rare individual who can believe one thing and say another on a regular basis. (Chomsky, cited in Rai, 1995: 44)

Thus, the PM emphasizes that media personnel internalize beliefs and attitudes which in turn influences media performance. This is a social psychological argument that is presumed but not directly tested by the PM. It was echoed by one of the journalists I interviewed in my research for this article:

A lot of journalists are genuinely clueless about the forces to which they are responding. Some are malleable, others try to act with integrity and are perpetually surprised at the blocks they encounter. Other suss out the system and either get out or act in concert with it. Those are the ones who often move up in the system. I've had journalists and editors tell me about the way things work very straightforwardly. Some combine both. There are a surprising number of higher up editors and producers who know they must accommodate the interests of ownership and other powers (in the case of public broadcasting) but within these constrictions, are still committed to as much muckraising as possible.¹⁴

In presuming that media personnel act in ways that effectively serve the interests of dominant elites, however, 'the PM can be seen to infer structural processes by appealing to psychological processes in individuals.'¹⁵ At the same time, it can be seen to presume various 'self-interested' or ideological motives from structural patterns in news coverage.¹⁶ The PM argues that how events are analysed, represented and evaluated by the elite media effectively demonstrates the extent to which editors and reporters can be seen to have 'adapted' to constraints of ownership, organization, market and political power. It contends further that elite media interlock with other institutional sectors in ownership,

management and social circles, effectively circumscribing their ability to remain analytically detached from other dominant institutional sectors.¹⁷

The model presumes that the interests and choices of the elite, agenda-setting media routinely serve class interests. It presumes that media typically 'protect' the interests of dominant elites. It contends that media will mobilize and divert, promote and suppress, legitimize and endorse, in such ways that it will be 'functional' for dominant elites and dominant social institutions.¹⁸ It assumes that media content serves 'political interests', serves to 'mobilize' (or not) sympathetic emotion for victims and outrage against victimizers, to divert public attention away from select news items and direct attention towards others.¹⁹ The PM can be seen to assume functional necessity and deliberately intended effects of media. It assumes that news discourse is framed so as to reproduce interpretations which endorse, legitimize and promote elite interests and presumes that media do in fact mislead audiences.

The most glaring criticism of the PM that may be voiced in this context is that the model can be seen to take for granted yet still presume intervening processes. While it does not theorize audience effects, it presumes that news content is framed so as to (re)produce 'privileged' interpretations of the news which are ideologically serviceable to corporate and state monied interests. If one assumes that 'ideologically serviceable' means that the interpretations can and typically do propagandize and/or mislead audiences, then on logical grounds one can infer that the PM does in fact presume and expect that media do have consequential influence and effects.²⁰ The critic might charge that the model itself takes for granted that media content serves political ends in alleged myriad ways. 'It clearly implies that media effects are sometimes quite deliberately intended and presumes that media coverage does have consequential effects. At the same time, the model focuses exclusively on media content, rather than expanding its scope to studying media effects directly. Nor does it "test" actual beliefs and motivations of media personnel or seek to investigate the possible range of effects on government officials, lower-tier media or audiences.'²¹ A critic might charge further that 'Its preferred explanation relies not just on antecedent conditions of media (interests and outlooks coincident with other members of the dominant class) but of additional "intervening" processes which come between objective similarities of interest and outlook.'²² This is not to dismiss its preferred explanation. 'Many who are familiar with Noam Chomsky's voluminous polemical writings on US foreign policy, for instance, agree that he provides circumstantial and other evidence

that does constitute 'proof' of hegemony and media complicity.' Concurrently, however, the critic might charge that 'the PM does infer self-interested or ideological motives (complicity, repressive tolerance) from structural patterns in news coverage and infers, and can be seen to explain away, structural processes by appealing to psychological processes in individuals.'²³

In effect, the PM takes for granted that media content serves political ends in myriad ways, but does not study these effects directly. There is, however, a range of scholarly literature and empirical studies which strongly suggest that media are extremely influential in terms of 'setting the agenda' for public discussion and influencing 'public opinion' on a range of issues/events (Winter, 1991; Winter, forthcoming; Cohen, 1963; Kellner, 1995; Nelson, 1989; McMurtry, 1998: 181–209; Lee and Solomon, 1990).²⁴ As Bernard Cohen (1963: 15) points out, media have long been vital components in state policy formation processes. A range of scholars stress that media are both culturally and politically influential (Hackett, 1991: 15; Desbarats, 1990: 149–50, 227; Clement, 1975: 278–81; Hartley, 1982: 9; van Dijk, 1998: 274; Heinrichs, 1989: 20–1).²⁵

There is some merit to the argument that Herman and Chomsky's PM seems to suggest a lack of agency on the part of media audiences. This has also been a criticism of other models, such as the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory. While it is certainly the case that people are not 'passive receivers' of media information, the PM's argument is that media texts are often encoded in specific ways, to valorize certain voices and interpretations over others, as the authors suggest with their filter mechanisms.²⁶

Herman and Chomsky concede that the PM does not explain 'everything' and in every context.²⁷ While it is true that the PM does not 'test' effects directly, 'it is important to note that this was not Herman and Chomsky's intention in the first place.'²⁸ In fact, as highlighted earlier, 'they deliberately state that their PM is one that deals with patterns of media behaviour and performance, and not effects. It is equally true that some media models focus almost entirely on "audience effects" and largely ignore the structural dimensions which Herman and Chomsky emphasize.'²⁹ Active audience studies, for instance, emphasize micro-level analysis.

While conceding that there are 'important elements of truth and insights in active audience analysis', Ed Herman (1996b: 15) characterizes active audience studies as 'narrowly focussed and politically conservative, by choice and default'. Herman (1996b: 15) stresses that the focus on micro-issues of language, text interpretation, and gender and

ethnic identity is 'politically safe and holds forth the possibility of endless deconstruction of small points in a growing framework of technical jargon'. On active audience studies proper, Herman (1996b: 16) comments:

The postmodern celebration of the power of the individual and rejection of global models (and inferentially, global solutions to problems) has an even deeper perversity, in that it reinforces individualism at a time when collective resistance to corporate domination is the central imperative. The market consists of numerous corporations that organize and plan to achieve their narrow goals, and which have been steadily growing in size, global reach and power. At home, they and their political allies are well funded and active; externally, institutions like the IMF, World Bank, the GATT-based World Trade Organization, and the world's governments, work on their behalf. Individual powerlessness grows in the face of the globalizing market; meanwhile, labour unions and other support organizations of ordinary citizens have been under siege and have weakened. . . . In this context, could anything be more perverse politically and intellectually than a retreat to micro-analysis, the celebration of minor individual triumphs, and reliance on solutions based on individual actions alone?

Another criticism of Herman and Chomsky's PM is that it presumes that the ideas of a unified ruling class and ruling-class interests may be taken for granted as straightforward and relatively unproblematic.³⁰ The PM does assume class cohesion, and argues that mass media interlock with other institutional sectors. Moreover, it concedes that the powerful have individual objectives and acknowledges that these are manifest in disagreements over tactics. The PM assumes that elite institutional sectors share common interests and subscribes to the view that a unified ruling class and institutional nexus exist, with common political, economic and social interests.³¹ The model presumes that media behaviour will reflect these interests. Media performance is understood as an outcome of market forces. Herman (1996a) highlights that,

The crucial structural factors derive from the fact that the dominant media are firmly imbedded in the market system. They are profit-seeking businesses, owned by very wealthy people (or other companies); they are funded largely by advertisers who are also profit-seeking entities, and who want their ads to appear in a supportive selling environment. The media are also dependent on government and other major business firms as information sources, and both efficiency and political considerations, and frequently overlapping interests, cause a certain degree of solidarity to prevail among the government, major media, and other corporate businesses.

The authors state that media serve to foster and enforce an intellectual and moral culture geared towards protecting wealth and privilege 'from the threat of public understanding and participation' (Chomsky, 1989: 14). Herman (2000) comments that, 'Because the propaganda model challenges basic premises and suggests that the media serve antidemocratic ends, it is commonly excluded from mainstream debates on media bias' (see also Herman, 1996a, 1999).

Herman and Chomsky's (1988) view of media as an ideological apparatus for dominant elites mirrors the thesis put forth by William Domhoff (1979) in his book, *The Powers That Be: Processes of Ruling Class Domination in America* (published nine years before *Manufacturing Consent*). Domhoff contends that there are four basic processes through which the ruling capitalist class 'rules': (1) the special interest process; (2) the policy formation process; (3) candidate selection; and (4) the ideological process.

In his book, *Canadian Corporate Elite*, Canadian sociologist Wallace Clement (1975) provides data and analysis demonstrating that a dominant ruling class within Canada is not only empirically specifiable but has remained remarkably consistent over the past century.³² The institutional nexus within Canada is highly concentrated at the elite level and institutional sectors interlock at the elite level (see McMurtry, 1998). Ownership of capital is highly concentrated. Corporate concentration and monopoly ownership are undeniable realities.

One can infer on reasonably logical grounds that contradictions and divergent interests that exist within and between the ruling bloc are eclipsed by the common goals and overlapping institutional interests/objectives that are shared among what arguably constitutes a unified ruling class.³³ As Canadian sociologist Patricia Marchak (1988: 122) emphasizes, 'the important question may be, not whether the state is closely allied with capital, but under what conditions the state would be obliged to act only with reference to the interests of capital'. Such theorizing, while 'presuming a unified ruling class, can also be seen to assume an atomized, individualized and "manipulated" mass public, one presumably not mobilized and/or well-organized enough to achieve meaningful dissent. Such conditions may not obtain *universally*. When they do, the validity of the PM is likely to increase.'³⁴

Herman and Chomsky argue that mass media behaviour is patterned and shaped by interlocks in ownership, common institutional imperatives and shared goals, market forces and internalized assumptions. The PM does not, however, argue that media are monolithic, or determined to the

extent that they are entirely closed to dissent or debate.³⁵ It does not ignore dissent.³⁶

Whatever the advantages of the powerful . . . the struggle goes on, space exists and dissent light breaks through in unexpected ways. The mass media are no monolith. (Herman, cited in Schlesinger, 1992: 308)

Elsewhere, in the final pages of *Manufacturing Consent*, Herman and Chomsky (1988: 306) make this same point, acknowledging that the 'system is not all powerful'.

Government and elite domination of the media have not succeeded in overcoming the Vietnam syndrome and public hostility to direct US involvement in the destabilization and overthrow of foreign governments. (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 306)

In conclusion, Herman and Chomsky's PM has been criticized for its basic assumptions regarding political economy, for its view of the major mass media as purveyors of ideologically serviceable propaganda, and for overall generalizability. Having introduced the article by overviewing several of the criticisms that have been levelled against the propaganda model, the article now provides a critical assessment and detailed review of the model itself.

A critical assessment and review of Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model

Herman and Chomsky's PM, initially referred to as a 'general theory of the Free Press', contends that America's elite agenda-setting media play an important role in establishing cultural hegemony, primarily by establishing a general framework for news discourse that is typically adhered to by lower-tier media.

For Herman and Chomsky, there is a clear demarcation between elite media – *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* – and the 'quality press' – a term they use to refer to more 'populist' newspapers, such as *The Boston Globe*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, among others (Chomsky, 1987: 135).

Chomsky remarks that the extent to which ideological constraints typically relax varies according to the geographic proximity of particular media organizations to the centres of economic and political power.

What happens in areas that are marginal with respect to the exercise of power doesn't matter so much. What happens in the centres of power matters a great deal. Therefore the controls are tighter to the extent that you get closer to the centre. (Chomsky, 1988: 629)

Within the geographic nexus of corporate–state power, however, Chomsky emphasizes that ideological control is typically extremely tight.

The PM contends that the agenda-setting media function as mechanisms of propaganda in several ways. The elite media determine what topics, issues and events are to be considered ‘newsworthy’ by the lower-tier media and establish the general premises of official discourse. Furthermore, elite media establish limitations on the range of debate and general boundaries for subsequent interpretation (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 1–2).

They determine, they select, they shape, they control, they restrict – in order to serve the interests of dominant, elite groups in the society. (Chomsky, cited in Wintonick and Achbar, 1994: 55)

Herman and Chomsky do not claim that media function only to circulate propaganda.³⁷ The PM, however, is concerned to describe ‘the forces that cause the mass media to play a propaganda role’ (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: xi–xii).

First and foremost, the PM constitutes an institutional critique of media performance. Herman and Chomsky argue that media serve the political and economic interests of dominant elites and charge that ‘the workings of the media . . . serve to mobilize support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity’ (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: xi).

Perhaps this is an obvious point, but the democratic postulate is that media are independent and committed to discovering and reporting the truth, and that they do not merely reflect the world as powerful groups wish it to be perceived. Leaders of the media claim that their news choices rest on unbiased professional and objective criteria, and they have support for this contention within the intellectual community. If, however, the powerful are able to fix the premises of discourse, to decide what the general populace is allowed to see, hear, and think about, and to ‘manage’ public opinion by regular propaganda campaigns, the standard view of how the system works is at serious odds with reality. (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: xi)

The PM argues that regularities of misrepresentation in news accounts flow directly from concentration of private power in society. It holds that elite media interlock with other institutional sectors in ownership, management and social circles, effectively circumventing their ability to remain analytically detached from the power structure of society, of which they themselves are an integral part. The net result of this, the authors

contend, is self-censorship without any significant coercion. Media performance is understood as an outcome of market forces.

Most biased choices in the media arise from the preselection of right-thinking people, internalized preconceptions, and the adaptation of personnel to the constraints of ownership, organization, market and political power. Censorship is largely self-censorship, by reporters and commentators who adjust to the realities of source and organizational media requirements, and by people at higher levels within media organizations who are chosen to implement, and have usually internalized, the constraints imposed by proprietary and other market and government centres of power. (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: xii)

Herman and Chomsky tell us that the institutional nexus is extremely tight, such that media share close interlocks with the state and corporate sectors.

The PM argues that media serve 'political ends' by mobilizing bias, patterning news choices, marginalizing dissent, by allowing 'the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public'³⁸ (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 2).

According to this framework, media serve to foster and reinforce an intellectual and moral culture geared towards protecting wealth and privilege 'from the threat of public understanding and participation' (Chomsky, 1989: 14).

The general picture is of a media machine acting as a self-regulating system where propaganda is produced voluntarily and in a decentralized way by media personnel who censor themselves on the basis of internalized sense of political correctness. (Rai, 1995: 46)

Market forces in action: the five 'filter elements' (constraints) explained

Herman and Chomsky (1988: 1–35) argue that the 'raw material of news' passes through a series of five interrelated filter constraints, 'leaving only the cleansed residue fit to print'. These filter elements continuously 'interact with and reinforce one another' and have multilevel effects on media performance (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 2). The five filter elements are:

... (1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and 'experts' funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) 'flak' as a means

of disciplining the media; and (5) 'anti-communism' as a national religion and control mechanism. (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 2)

The first filter constraint emphasizes that media are closely interlocked and share common interests with other dominant institutional sectors (corporations, the state, banks) (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 3–14). As Herman and Chomsky point out: 'the dominant media firms are quite large businesses; they are controlled by very wealthy people or by managers who are subject to sharp constraints by owners and other market-profit-oriented forces' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 14).

The second filter highlights the influence of advertising values on the news production process. To remain financially viable, most media must sell markets (readers) to buyers (advertisers). This dependency can directly influence media performance.³⁹ Chomsky (1989: 8) remarks that media content naturalizes, reflecting 'the perspectives and interests of the sellers, the buyers, and the product' (see also Herman, 1999).

Herman (2000) contends that the relevance of the first and second filters have enhanced since *Manufacturing Consent* was first published:

The dramatic changes in the economy, the communications industries, and politics over the past dozen years have tended on balance to enhance the applicability of the propaganda model. The first two filters – ownership and advertising – have become even more important.

The third filter notes that dominant elites routinely facilitate the news-gathering process: providing press releases, advance copies of speeches, periodicals, photo opportunities and ready-for-news analysis (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 19). Thus, government and corporate sources are attractive to the media for purely economic reasons. Such sources are favoured and are routinely endorsed and legitimized by the media because they are recognizable and viewed as *prima facie* credible. Information provided to the media by corporate and state sources does not require fact checking or costly background research and is typically portrayed as accurate.

In sum, Herman and Chomsky highlight not only the symbiotic nature of the relationship between journalists and their sources, but the reciprocity of interests involved in the relationship. The third filter constraint stresses that the opinions and analyses that are expounded by corporate and state sources are adapted to dominant class interests and market forces (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 23; see also Martin and Knight, 1997: 253–4). Cited by the corporate media as experts and/or 'authorized knowers', their opinions are often accepted without scrutiny. Dissenting views are frequently excluded from public forums. In this way,

core assumptions that cannot stand up to factual analysis can find widespread support.

Herman and Chomsky stress that the nature of the symbiotic relationship between media and sources directly influences media performance.

Because of their services, continuous contact on the beat, and mutual dependency, the powerful can use personal relationships, threats, and rewards to further influence and coerce the media. The media may feel obligated to carry extremely dubious stories and mute criticism in order not to offend their sources and disturb a close relationship. It is very difficult to call authorities on whom one depends for daily news liars, even if they tell whoppers. Critical sources may be avoided not only because of their lesser availability and higher cost of establishing credibility, but also because the primary sources may be offended and may even threaten the media using them. (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 22)

Importantly, the authors contend that preferred meanings are structured into news discourse as a result of the dominance of official sources who are identified as 'experts'. In this way, news discourse 'may be skewed in the direction desired by the government and "the market"' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 23). Concurrently, the '*preferred*' meanings that are structured into news discourse are typically 'those that are functional for elites' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 23).⁴⁰

Flak, the fourth filter, means that dominant social institutions (most notably the state) possess the power and requisite organizational resources to pressure media to play a propagandistic role in society. Herman and Chomsky (1988: 26) explain that:

Flak refers to negative responses to a media statement or program. . . . It may be organized centrally or locally, or it may consist of the entirely independent actions of individuals.

In sum, the authors maintain that there are powerful interests that routinely encourage right-wing bias in media (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 27–8).

According to the PM, these filter constraints are the most dominant elements in the news production process, and they continuously interact with one another and operate on an individual and institutional basis (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 2; Rai, 1995: 40). According to Herman and Chomsky, the filter constraints excise the news that powerful interests deem *not* fit to print.

Since the publication of *Manufacturing Consent*, the demise of communism in the former Soviet Union has brought about radical

changes in the world political landscape. According to Chomsky, the last filter, that of anti-communism, still functions in the post-Cold War world, but has been replaced with a dichotomy of 'otherness'. Chomsky (1998: 41) explains that:

... it's the idea that grave enemies are about to attack us and we need to huddle under the protection of domestic power. You need something to frighten people with, to prevent them from paying attention to what's really happening to them. You have to somehow engender fear and hatred, to channel the kind of fear and rage – or even just discontent – that's being aroused by social and economic conditions.⁴¹

Ed Herman concedes that the filter perhaps should have been originally termed 'the dominant ideology', so as to include elements of the dominant ideology that are referred to at various points throughout *Manufacturing Consent*; such as the merits of private enterprise, or the benevolence of one's own government (Herman, cited in Wintonick and Achbar, 1994: 108). In the end, however, anti-communism was selected, primarily because the authors wished to emphasize the ideological elements that have been most important in terms of disciplinary and control mechanisms. As it is laid out in *Manufacturing Consent*, the description of the fifth filter is vague and is already veering towards the newly revised definition. For example, Herman and Chomsky (1988: 29) originally wrote that:

This ideology helps mobilize the populace against an enemy, and because the concept is fuzzy it can be used against anybody advocating policies that threaten property interests or support accommodation with Communist states and radicalism.

Herman (2000) suggests that the 'potential weakening' of the fifth filter mechanism/constraint in the contemporary political-economic landscape is 'easily offset by the greater ideological force of the belief in the "miracle of the market" (Reagan)'.⁴²

Herman and Chomsky state that these five filter constraints capture the essential ingredients of the PM. The authors argue that there is 'a systematic and highly political dichotomization in news coverage based on serviceability to important domestic power interests' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 35). Herman and Chomsky contend that this dichotomy is routinely observable in 'choices of story and in the volume and quality of coverage' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 35). They maintain that choices for publicity and suppression are bound to the five filter constraints just outlined. The authors argue that media shape public

opinion by controlling how ideas are presented, and also by limiting the range of credible alternatives. Herman and Chomsky write that:

The five filters narrow the range of news that passes through the gates, and even more sharply limit what can become 'big news,' subject to sustained news campaigns. By definition, news from primary establishment sources meets one major filter requirement and is readily accommodated by the mass media. Messages from and about dissidents and weak, unorganized individuals and groups, domestic and foreign, are at an initial disadvantage in sourcing costs and credibility, and they often do not comport with the ideology or interests of the gatekeepers and other powerful parties that influence the filtering process. (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 31)

Media: threatening democracy, inducing avoidance, self-indulgently hypocritical?

The PM argues that the elite agenda-setting media legitimize dominant ideological principles and social institutions by systematically defending the principal 'economic, social and political agendas' of dominant elites and social institutions (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 298). In Chomsky's view, it is not surprising that they fulfil this function:

If you look at the institutional structure of media and the pressures that act on them and so forth and so on, you would tend on relatively uncontroversial assumptions to expect that the media would serve this function.⁴³

As noted, Herman and Chomsky's view of media as an ideological apparatus for elites mirrors the thesis put forth by William Domhoff (1979) in *The Powers That Be: Processes of Ruling Class Domination in America*. On the ideology process, Domhoff (1979: 169) writes that:

The ideology process consists of the numerous methods through which members of the power elite attempt to shape the beliefs, attitudes and opinions of the underlying population. . . . Free and open discussion are claimed to be the hallmarks of the process, but past experience shows that its leaders will utilize deceit and violence in order to combat individuals and organizations which espouse attitudes and opinions that threaten the power and privileges of the ruling class. . . . The ideology process is necessary because public opinion does not naturally and automatically agree with the opinions of the power elite.

Like Herman and Chomsky, Domhoff stresses that the ideological network is both 'extremely diverse and diffuse' (Domhoff, 1979: 173), and such that media interact with other institutional sectors in circulating knowledge and shaping public opinion on a range of foreign

policy and key domestic issues, such as the functioning of the economy (Domhoff, 1979: 179–83).⁴⁴

It bears noting that Herman and Chomsky appropriated the phrase 'manufacturing consent' from the influential American journalist Walter Lippman, who advocated consent engineering early in the 20th century. For Lippman, the 'manufacture of consent' was both necessary and favourable, predominantly because, in Lippman's view, 'the common interests' – meaning, presumably, issues of concern to all citizens in democratic societies – 'very largely elude public opinion entirely'. Lippman postulated that 'the common good' ought to be 'managed' by a small 'specialized class' (Lippman, cited in Wintonick and Achbar, 1994: 40). Lippman recommended that the role of the electorate – the 'bewildered herd', as he called them – be restricted to that of 'interested spectators of action' (Lippman, cited in Rai, 1995: 23). Lippman predicted that the 'self-conscious art of persuasion' would eventually come to preface every 'political calculation' and 'modify every political premise'. Lippman stressed that consent engineering is not historically inconsistent with the overall 'practice of democracy'. In his own words,

The creation of consent is not a new art. It is a very old one which was supposed to have died out with the appearance of democracy. But it has not died out. It has, in fact, improved enormously in technic [*sic*], because it is now based on analysis rather than on rule of thumb. As so, as a result of psychological research, coupled with the modern means of communication, the practice of democracy has turned a corner. A revolution is taking place, infinitely more significant than any shifting of economic power. (Lippman, 1922, cited in Wintonick and Achbar, 1994: 40)

In 1947, in an article titled 'The Engineering of Consent', published in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Edward Bernays put forth a similar argument in support of 'the manufacture of consent'. Like Walter Lippman, Bernays declares that the interests of 'democracy' are particularly well served by 'the application of scientific principles and tried practices' to the 'the engineering of consent'. Bernays asserts that consent engineering is at the heart of democracy and characterizes it as 'among our most valuable contributions to the efficient functioning of society'.

The engineering of consent is the very essence of the democratic process, the freedom to persuade and suggest. The freedoms of speech, press, petition, and assembly, the freedoms to make the engineering of consent possible, are among the most cherished guarantees of the Constitution of the United States. (Bernays, 1947, cited in Wintonick and Achbar, 1994: 41)

Chomsky notes that the conception of democracy which underlies such doctrines is relatively consistent with the fundamental principles and ideals of America's founding fathers.

In his various political works Chomsky (1988: 679) frequently cites a statement made by John Jay – 'Those who own the country ought to govern it' – to illustrate this. John Jay was the first chief justice of the Supreme Court and president of the Constitutional Convention.

In translation, Chomsky remarks that 'we're subject to democracy of the marketplace'.

It's a game for elites, it's not for the ignorant masses, who have to be marginalized, diverted, and controlled – of course for their own good. (Chomsky, cited in Wintonick and Achbar, 1994: 40)

According to Chomsky, the effectiveness of thought control in democratic societies owes much to the fact that ideological indoctrination is combined with a general impression that society is relatively open and free (Chomsky, 1982: 91f.).

In brief, it is necessary to ensure that those who own the country are happy, or else all will suffer, for they control investment and determine what is produced and distributed and what benefits will trickle down to those who rent themselves to the owners when they can. For the homeless in the streets, then, the highest priority must be to ensure that the dwellers in the mansions are reasonably content. Given the options available within the system and the cultural values it reinforces, maximization of short-term individual gain appears to be the rational course, along with submissiveness, obedience, and abandonment of the public arena. The bounds on political action are correspondingly limited. Once the forms of capitalist democracy are in place, they remain very stable, whatever suffering ensues – a fact that has long been understood. (Chomsky, 1989: 22)

The PM argues that because 'thought control' is virtually transparent in democratic societies, the propaganda system is actually more effective and efficient than it is in totalitarian states.

This view of dominant social institutions as autocratic, oppressive, deterministic and coercive can be understood as the bedrock upon which the foundations of the PM are constructed. Herman and Chomsky, in arguing that the mass media mobilize support for corporate and state monied interests, contend that media play a key role in engineering or manufacturing consent. Thus, it is important to highlight their argument that media performance is 'guided' by dominant elites. Media content is directly relevant to the manufacture of consent. Herman and Chomsky (1988: 35) state that there is a 'systematic and highly political dichotomization in news coverage' that is 'based on serviceability to

important domestic power interests'. They maintain that the propaganda function of the mass media is observable in choices of story selection, in the quantity and quality of coverage, and in modes of handling some stories as opposed to others. The authors explain that 'the modes of handling favoured and inconvenient materials (placement, tone, context, fullness of treatment) differ in ways that serve political ends' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 35). Thus, it is assumed that media content serves 'political ends', by 'mobilizing interest and outrage' and by generating interest and sympathetic emotion in some stories while directing attention away from others (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 35).

Central methodological assumptions of the propaganda model

This section provides an overview of the main methodological assumptions of the PM. As noted, the PM argues that media 'mobilize support for special interests that dominate the state and private activity' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: xi). Moreover, the PM suggests that media choices pertaining to treatment of particular news stories and events are fundamentally political ones.

The PM predicts that the treatment accorded news stories and events by the elite, agenda-setting media vary in ways that serve political ends. It identifies several areas of import, and these are examined later.

To begin, then, it is important to stress that the PM predicts that media will exemplify tendencies towards ideological closure and that media coverage will be aligned with elite interests. As noted, the PM hypothesizes that contradictions and divergent interests within and between the ruling bloc are eclipsed by the common goals and overlapping institutional interests/objectives shared among what arguably constitutes a unified ruling class.

The PM has its own methodological approach to news analysis and makes a range of predictions concerning patterns of media behaviour. These include first-order, second-order and third-order predictions. Each of these predictions is explored in the following.

The propaganda model makes predictions at various levels. There are first-order predictions about how the media function. The model also makes second-order predictions about how media performance will be discussed and evaluated. And it makes third-order predictions about the reactions to studies of media performance. The general prediction, at each level, is that what enters into the mainstream will support the needs of established power. (Chomsky, 1989: 153)

The PM assumes that media suppress and distort, advocate and promote, in the interests of establishing ideologically serviceable consensus that will legitimize and facilitate corporate and state monied interests.

This, then, is a first-order prediction of Herman and Chomsky's PM.

In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfill this role requires systematic propaganda. (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 2)

The PM argues that the media routinely make selection choices that establish and define 'worthy' and 'unworthy' causes.

Herman and Chomsky charge that news coverage devoted to government (state) policy in general (foreign and domestic) by the elite, agenda-setting media is typically 'framed' in order to effectively legitimize and facilitate the (geo)political-economic interests of dominant elites.

As noted, the PM contends that media content is often organized to manufacture consent and to prevent opposition to corporate hegemony. It predicts that elite, agenda-setting media serve a propaganda function such that 'modes of handling favoured and inconvenient materials (placement, tone, context, fullness of treatment) differ in ways that serve political ends' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 35). Within this framework media content is said to serve 'political ends' by 'mobilizing interest and outrage', and by generating audience interest and sympathy in some stories while directing interest and attention away from others (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 35).

Herman and Chomsky argue that elite, agenda-setting western media can be seen to share a 'close interest in the Third World, and their interconnections with the government in these policies are symbiotic' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 13–14). The PM predicts that media typically treat victims of oppression and state terrorism differently, depending upon the perpetrator(s). This is a first-order prediction of the PM. It predicts that there will be qualitative and quantitative differences in treatment in accorded 'unworthy victims' (victims of oppression and/or state terrorism perpetrated by us (Canada, the US and the other capitalist democracies)), and 'worthy victims' (victims of oppression and/or state terrorism perpetrated by official enemy states). It hypothesizes that differences in treatment will be observable in sourcing of stories, in how stories are evaluated, and in the 'investigatory zeal in the search for . . . villainy and the responsibility of high officials', such that worthy victims

are typically accorded more news coverage, more prominent coverage, and more humanistic treatment (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 34–5).

In the case of enemy crimes, we find outrage; allegations based on the flimsiest evidence, often simply invented, and uncorrectable, even when conceded to be fabrication; careful filtering of testimony to exclude contrary evidence while allowing what may be useful; reliance on official U.S. sources, unless they provide the wrong picture, in which case they are avoided (Cambodia under Pol Pot is a case in point); vivid detail; insistence that the crimes originate at the highest level of planning, even in the absence of evidence or credible argument; and so on. Where the locus of responsibility is at home, we find precisely the opposite: silence or apologetics; avoidance of personal testimony and specific detail; world-weary wisdom about the complexities of history and foreign cultures that we do not understand; narrowing of focus to the lowest levels of planning or understandable error in confusing circumstances; and other forms of evasion. (Chomsky, 1989: 137)

Herman and Chomsky (1988: 35) contend that there is a systematic and political dichotomization in news discourse, observable in story selection choices and in editorial choices pertaining to story construction, headlines, fullness of context and story treatment.

We would expect different criteria of evaluation to be employed, so that what is villainy in enemy states will be presented as incidental background fact in the case of oneself and friends. What is on the agenda in treating one case will be off the agenda in discussing the other. (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 34)

The PM predicts that reporting on the democracies will feature the 'uncritical acceptance of premises', will rely almost exclusively upon information provided by official state sources, will promote ideologically serviceable themes and facts. It predicts that the victims of state-sponsored terrorism/violence that is perpetuated by the democracies, its allies and/or client states will be accorded treatment that can be seen to serve the ideological and political ends of dominant elites, suggesting that unworthy victims will 'merit only slight detail, minimal humanization, and little context that will excite and enrage' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 35).

The PM also argues that the elite, agenda-setting western media fulfil a propaganda function by adhering to an imperialist ideology and by legitimizing US interventionist forays, thereby protecting the Fifth Freedom. This, Chomsky (1985: 44) comments, is the freedom of capitalist corporations to rob, exploit and rape the natural resources and people of the developing world.⁴⁵

Chomsky employs two methodological techniques to test the model. The first is to study 'paired examples' of historical events during the same period of time. Disparities in treatment can lend insight into interpreting media behaviour. The second method of testing the PM, and that which is most favoured by Chomsky in his polemical writings, is to explore the range of permitted opinion on crucial topics.

One appropriate method is to consider the spectrum of opinion allowed expression. According to the propaganda model, one would expect the spectrum to be bounded by the consensus of powerful elites while encouraging tactical debate within it. (Chomsky, 1989: 59)

This approach highlights the importance of scrutinizing media content, sources, framing and representation in news discourse.⁴⁶ The first-order predictions of the PM are exclusively concerned with the observable patterns of media behaviour.

The second- and third-order predictions of the PM are concerned with the role that the institutional ideological institutions play in policing the boundaries of intellectual debates. More specifically, they are concerned with how social institutions, and the professional classes working within them, serve to foster and reinforce an intellectual environment that effectively prevents opposition to the dominant ideology and structures of ideological rule. Both predictions speak to the issue of civil liberties and academic freedom within the institutional setting of the academy and within the broader intellectual culture.

The second-order prediction of the PM is that studies and analysis of news media which prove that the PM is correct in its first-order predictions will be effectively excluded from intellectual debate(s) on media discourse and media behaviour. This is predictable under a thesis of corporate hegemony.

One prediction of the model is that it will be effectively excluded from discussion, for it questions the factual assumption that is most serviceable to the interests of established power: namely, that the media are cantankerous, perhaps excessively so. However well-confirmed the model may be, then, it is inadmissible, and, the model predicts, should remain outside the spectrum of debate over media. Note that the model has a rather disconcerting feature. Plainly, it is either valid or invalid. If invalid, it may be dismissed; if valid, it will be dismissed. (Chomsky, 1989: 11)

Chomsky suggests at least three reasons why the PM should be included in intellectual and academic debate(s) on patterns of media behaviour: (1) as stressed by Chomsky in his polemical writings and as noted earlier, there is a tradition of advocacy on the part of elite intellectuals for media

to serve a propaganda function in society vis-a-vis manufacturing consent (Chomsky, 1987: 132); (2) autonomy of the mass media is marginal due to increasingly concentrated corporate ownership, dependence on advertising as *the* principal source of revenue, and routine reliance upon corporate and state sources, thus, on logical grounds, the first-order prediction of the PM regarding patterns of media behaviour is intuitively plausible; (3) public opinion polls indicate that there is significant public support for the view that media are propagandistic. Chomsky asserts that:

... from these three observations, elite advocacy, prior plausibility and kind of general acceptance of the view, you would draw one conclusion at least. You would draw the conclusion that the Propaganda Model ought to be part of the debate, part of the discussion over how the media function. (Chomsky, cited in Rai, 1995: 23)

On logical grounds, that the PM is typically excluded from academic and intellectual debates on media and patterns of media behaviour seems to confirm the PM's second-order prediction.

It is rare to discover in the mainstream any recognition of the existence or possibility of analysis of the ideological system in terms of a propaganda model, let alone to try and confront it on rational grounds. (Chomsky, 1989: 151)

Moreover,

By and large, the possibility of studying the functioning of the media in terms of a propaganda model is simply ignored. (Chomsky, 1989: 145)

The PM's third-order prediction is that intellectual and academic analyses and studies, however well grounded in logical argument and coupled with an adequate amount of supporting evidence, which prove that the PM's first-order predictions are correct, will be bitterly condemned.

On the crucial third-order prediction, Chomsky comments that:

... the model predicts that such inquiry will be ignored or bitterly condemned, for it conflicts with the needs of the powerful and the privileged. (Chomsky, 1989: 153)

This is entirely predictable under the thesis of corporate hegemony as well.

Chomsky's critique of intellectuals (and academics) as servants of power has been well documented (most notably, by Jacoby, 1987: 182–200; also see Coker, 1987: 269–77). In sum, Chomsky contends that the liberal-intelligentsia have been assimilated into the 'establishment'

and are fully integrated into the institutional nexus of state and corporate power.

Chomsky argues that contemporary intellectuals play important roles in establishing and legitimizing cultural hegemony, and maintains that universities, like the other ideological institutions, function to manage and police ideologized spectrums of opinion.

Chomsky stresses that intellectual dissenters are often 'filtered out' at the graduate-school level, when they are particularly vulnerable to outside pressures, if they are unwilling or unable to conform, or if they are unwilling to subordinate social, political and class-based commitments (see Chomsky, 1988: 6–8; Said, 1994: 321).

To confront power is costly and difficult; high standards of evidence and argument are imposed, and critical analysis is naturally not welcomed by those who are in a position to react vigorously and to determine the array of rewards and punishments. (Chomsky, 1989: 8–9)

In Chomsky's view, however, the writer is invested with a *moral* responsibility to tell the truth. Chomsky writes,

About the responsibility to try to find and tell the truth . . . it is often hard, and can be personally costly, particularly for those who are more vulnerable. That is true even in societies that are very free; in others the cost can be severe indeed.

The responsibility of the writer as a *moral agent* is to try to bring the truth about *matters of human significance* to an *audience that can do something about them*. This is part of what it means to be a moral agent rather than a monster. It is hard to think of a less contentious proposal than this truism. . .

Unfortunately, that is not quite the case, for a simple reason: the standard practice of the intellectual communities to which we (more or less) belong rejects this elementary moral principle, with considerable fervor and passion, in fact. (Chomsky, 1997c: 55–6)

Nexus: interrelations of state and corporate capitalism and the corporate media

In sum, the PM constitutes an institutional critique of mass media. It highlights the multilevel ways in which money and power influence media performance, argues that media interests and choices routinely amount to propaganda campaigns, and suggests that media performance reflects the fact that dominant media firms share interlocking and common interests with other institutional sectors.

Societies differ, but in ours, the major decisions over what happens in the society – decisions over investment and production and distribution and so on – are in the hands of a relatively concentrated network of major corporations and conglomerates and investment firms. They are also the ones who staff the major executive positions in the government. They're the ones who own the media and they're the ones who have to be put in a position to make the decisions. They have an overwhelmingly dominant role in the way life happens. . . . Within the economic system, by law and in principle, they dominate. The control over resources and the need to satisfy their interests imposes very sharp restraints on the political system and on the ideological system. (Chomsky, cited in Wintonick and Achbar, 1994: 51)

It is upon this conception of social organization that the foundations of the PM are constructed. Chomsky emphasizes that propaganda campaigns are often planned, and that there is a correlation between patterns of media behaviour and broader institutional and market imperatives. Furthermore, Herman and Chomsky's PM assumes the existence of a unified ruling capitalist class. Its theoretic underpinnings stress that elites are overrepresented in government and big business sectors.

The PM assumes that dominant elites are the major initiator of action in society. They dominate economic decision-making processes, as well as the political processes.⁴⁷ As noted, the PM hypothesizes that elites share common interests and goals that are largely integrated.⁴⁸ Herman and Chomsky acknowledge that elites can disagree but stress that such disagreements are largely confined to tactics on how they can achieve common goals. Disagreement over tactics will be reflected in mass media discourse.

The mass media are not a solid monolith on all issues. Where the powerful are in disagreement, there will be a certain diversity of tactical judgments on how to attain shared aims, reflected in media debate. But views that challenge fundamental premises or suggest that the observed modes of exercise of state power are based on systemic factors will be excluded from the mass media even when elite controversy over tactics rages fiercely. (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: xiii)

The PM acknowledges that a careful and thorough reading of the mass media will bear this out. However, 'the filter constraints are so powerful, and built into the system in such a fundamental way, that alternative bases of news choices are hardly imaginable' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 2). Furthermore, the PM holds that the illusion of genuine debate serves to reinforce the overall effectiveness of the propaganda system in society (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 298). Chomsky remarks that:

The more vigorous the debate, the better the system of propaganda is served, since the tacit, unspoken assumptions are more forcefully implanted. (Chomsky, 1982: 81)

While emphasizing its extensive reach and resiliency, Chomsky describes the propaganda system as 'inherently unstable', commenting that, 'Any system that's based on lying and deceit is inherently unstable' (Chomsky, 1987: 49). Even so, the authors contend that the filter constraints have powerful unilinear effects, such that media interests and choices serve class interests on a consistent basis.⁴⁹

In conclusion, it is important to highlight that Herman and Chomsky's PM encourages intellectual and political opposition to fundamental trends that accommodate the established order and structures of ideological rule (see Chomsky, 1998: 138–48). Chomsky suggests that individuals can actively combat the propaganda system and states that the first step is to develop what he refers to as a 'sceptical reflex'.

It's got to get to the point where it's like a reflex to read the first page of the L.A. Times and to count the lies and distortions and to put it into some sort of rational framework. (Chomsky, 1988: 740)

Mounting such a course of intellectual self-defence requires sufficient motivation and intellectual resources. Chomsky believes that combating the propaganda system requires the ability to think independently and desire to think critically. Intellectual self-defence also entails hard work. To defend against the propaganda system and gain an understanding of many issues, Chomsky says 'you're going to have to read exotic newspapers, and you're going to have to compare today's lies with yesterday's lies and see if you can construct some rational story out of them. It's a major effort' (Chomsky, 1988: 717). To do this, Chomsky (1988: 742) warns that: 'you have to decide to become a fanatic. . . . You have to work, because nobody's going to make it easy for you.' Thus, in terms of motivation, desire is the major requisite. Beyond this, intellectual self-defence entails a 'willingness to look at the facts with an open mind, to put simple assumptions to the test, and to pursue an argument to its conclusions' (Chomsky, 1979: 5). On what intellectual resources are required to undertake this, Chomsky comments:

I frankly don't think that anything more is required than ordinary common sense. . . . A willingness to use one's own native intelligence and common sense to analyse and dissect and compare facts with the way in which they're presented is really sufficient. (Chomsky, cited in Rai, 1995: 53)

With a little industry and application, anyone who is willing to extricate himself [*sic*] from the system of shared ideology and propaganda will

readily see through the modes of distortion developed by substantial segments of the intelligentsia. Everybody is capable of doing this. (Chomsky, cited in Rai, 1995: 53)

In Chomsky's view, individuals who wish to pursue intellectual self-defence will also need to gain access to independent media.⁵⁰ This is important, Chomsky states, because the mass media routinely block information and reproduce dominant representations. Chomsky contends that individuals do not require political scientists to explain 'political affairs' to them.

The alleged complexity, depth, and obscurity of these questions is part of the illusion propagated by the system of ideological control, which aims to make these issues seem remote from the general population and to persuade them of their incapacity to organize their own affairs and understand the social world in which they live without the tutelage of intermediaries. (Chomsky, cited in Rai, 1995: 53)

In the preface to the collection of his Massey Lectures, titled *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies*, Chomsky states that:

My personal feeling is that citizens of the democratic capitalist societies should undertake a course of intellectual self-defence to protect themselves from manipulation and mind-control. (Chomsky, 1989: vii)

Elsewhere, Chomsky comments that,

An independent mind must seek to separate itself from official doctrine, and from the criticism advanced by its alleged opponents; not just from the assertions of the propaganda system, but from its tacit presuppositions as well, expressed by critic and defender. This is a far more difficult task. (Chomsky, 1982: 81)

Concluding remarks

Herman and Chomsky's institutional critique of media behaviour is forceful and convincing, as is their analysis of the ideological formation of public opinion and of the 'Orwellian' abuse of language in western democracies.

'Brainwashing under freedom' is Chomsky's catchphrase for the hypocrisy of western liberal opinion and its relationship to power.

The thesis put forth in *Manufacturing Consent*, that consent in a 'free society' is manufactured through manipulation of public opinion, perhaps even more now than when their book was originally published, bespeaks journalistic self-censorship in an era in which corporate ownership of media has never been as concentrated, right-wing pressure on public

radio and television is increasing, the public relations industries are expanding exponentially, and advertising values dominate the news production process.⁵¹ If ever there was a time for the PM to be included in scholarly debates on media performance, it is now.

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Suzanne Kondratenko (3 March 1974–11 September 2001).

Notes

I wish to thank Dr Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, Department of Communication Studies, University of Windsor, for her insightful feedback.

1. This view echoes Miliband, who wrote that:
There is nothing particularly surprising about the character and role of the major mass media in advanced capitalist society. Given the economic and political context in which they function, they cannot fail to be, predominantly, agencies for the dissemination of ideas and values which affirm rather than challenge existing patterns of power and privilege, and thus to be weapons in the arsenal of class domination. (Miliband, cited in Clement, 1975: 278)
2. In *Chomsky's Politics*, Milan Rai (1995: 42) remarks: 'If the explanation is based on the nature of institutions, not the machinations of individuals, it cannot, by definition, be given the name "conspiracy theory".'
3. Herman (2000) takes this up in 'The Propaganda Model: A Retrospective'.
4. It bears mentioning in this context that Herman was the principal author of the first chapter of *Manufacturing Consent*, in which the filter mechanisms are laid out. A new edition of the book, with a new introduction, was published in January 2002.
5. Personal correspondence, 8 December 1998.
6. For analysis of the influence of owners and media professional ideals on news discourse see Gans (1979) and Tuchman (1978).
7. Chomsky (1982: 14) does, however, acknowledge seductions of privilege.
8. Personal correspondence, Dr Peter Archibald, Sociology, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, November 2001.
9. Edward Herman (2000) adds that, 'This would seem to be one of the model's merits; it shows a dynamic and self-protecting system in operation.'
10. Specifically, when elites are divided over tactics, 'space' is created, allowing room for debate (see Herman, 2000). Hackett (1991: 281) also points out that dissent is likely to find expression in the major mass media only when

certain conditions are met. These conditions, however, can be seen to favour the explanatory logic of the PM.

11. Despite the gate-keeper model's theoretic inadequacies, Hackett (1991: 98) states that it is an appropriate description of the work that newspaper editors actually do 'with regard to news about national and international affairs: They select and disseminate, rather than generate, such news'.
12. Stuart Hall explains that preferred codes are 'rendered invisible by the process of ideological masking and taking-for-granted. . . . They seem to be, even to those who employ and manipulate them for the purposes of encoding, simply "the sum of what we already know"' (Hall, cited in Winter, 1991: 44).
13. Right-wing think tanks, such as the Fraser and C.D. Howe Institutes in Canada, and the PR industries worldwide, more generally, can be ideologically significant in relation to what Herman and Chomsky call 'manufacturing consent', beyond the direct control that owners exert over their 'outlets'.
14. Personal correspondence, 19 October 2001.
15. Personal correspondence, Dr Peter Archibald, September 2001.
16. Personal correspondence, Dr Peter Archibald, November 2001.
17. Other scholars contend that media are far more pluralistic. Doyle et al. (1997: 243) state that 'media are more open, pluralistic, and diverse than the more pessimistic dominant ideology suggests'.
18. Schlesinger (1992: 306, 308) argues that the PM sets out a highly deterministic view of how media operate, 'coupled with a straightforward functionalist conception of ideology'.
19. As Cohen (1963: 13) put it, media 'may not be successful in telling people what to think' but there is much evidence that they are 'stunningly successful in telling people what to think about'.
20. Personal correspondence, Dr Peter Archibald, November 2001.
21. Personal correspondence, Dr Peter Archibald, November 2001.
22. Personal correspondence, Dr Peter Archibald, November 2001.
23. Personal correspondence, Dr Peter Archibald, November 2001.
24. Numerous studies show that newspapers play a vital ideological role in defining social reality, reproducing dominant worldviews and mobilizing opinion (Fishman, 1980; Ericson et al., 1989). Van Dijk (1988: 39) writes that newspapers also play an important role in establishing the 'newsworthiness' of international events and stories.
25. Vivian and Maurin (2000: 302) note that agenda-setting occurs at various levels: (1) creating awareness, (2) establishing priorities and (3) perpetuating issues. See Winter (1991) for analysis of Canadian media coverage of the Persian Gulf Conflict, and other case studies.
26. Personal correspondence, Dr Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, Department of Communications, University of Windsor, November 2001.

27. No one theory is all-encompassing, but this does not detract from the fact that the PM can still be effective in certain cases.
28. Personal correspondence, Dr Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, November 2001.
29. Personal correspondence, Dr Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, November 2001.
30. Chomsky (1997a: 61) prefers not to use the term 'ruling class', thinking it insufficient for serious class analysis. Instead, he prefers the term 'elites' or 'dominant elites', but concedes that because 'political discourse is so debased', it is only possible to 'talk vaguely about the establishment', or about 'people in the dominant sectors'.
31. The debate here effectively mirrors the Marxist response to the liberal-bourgeois thesis within Canadian sociology.
32. See also Dobbin (1998).
33. Bottomore (1993: 119) makes the point that at the global level:

The world economy is dominated by 500 of the largest multinational corporations, by the nation states in which they have their headquarters, and by those institutions of world capitalism such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund which determine and regulate economic development on a global scale.

34. Personal correspondence, Dr Peter Archibald, September 2001.
35. At the same time, however, Herman and Chomsky (1988: 301) do state that media behaviour is determined, to the extent that most mass media are themselves interlocked with the ruling bloc.
36. In *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*, Chomsky stresses that dissent culture continues to thrive, despite the structural forces present in the mainstream media. This is echoed, strongly, by Herman (1996a, 2000) who states that critics often fail to recognize that the PM is 'about how the media work, not how effective they are'.
37. In the Preface to *Manufacturing Consent* Herman and Chomsky (1988: xi) note that: 'We do not claim this is all the mass media do, but we believe the propaganda function to be a very important aspect of their overall service.'
38. Herman and Chomsky (1988: xii) describe the PM as a 'guided market system' within which the *guidance* is 'provided by the government, the leaders of the corporate community, the top media owners and executives, and the assorted individuals and groups who are assigned or allowed to take constructive initiatives'.
39. Cohen and Young (1973: 16); Clement (1975: 280–1); Martin and Knight (1997: 253); Bagdikian (1983: 160–73); Lee and Solomon (1990: 65–72); Nelson (1989).
40. Herman (2000) writes that 'Studies of news sources reveal that a significant proportion of news originates in public relations releases. There are, by one

- count, 20,000 more public relations agents working to doctor the news today than there are journalists writing it.'
41. The filter constraint suggests that media generate fear. It also suggests that media redirect fear that already exists. See Chomsky (1997a: 91–2) for further discussion of the latter.
 42. See McMurtry (1998) and Dobbin (1998) for evidence of this.
 43. Source: transcript, 'Noam Chomsky Meets the Washington Press', National Press Club, DC, 11 April 1989, p. 2.
 44. Domhoff (1979: 57) asserts that the sum total of special interest is class rule, i.e. 'what is *not* done and *not* debated defines ruling-class domination even if the class as a whole does not act consciously to realize its will and to subordinate other classes'.
 45. For more on the 'Fifth Freedom', see Chomsky (1992a, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1997a) as well as George (1991); see Haley and Lunsford (1994) for a thorough and critical assessment of Chomsky's polemical writings.
 46. The PM also emphasizes the importance of delineating the absence of historical context in news reporting and treats as significant the degree to which news is isolated from prior and subsequent events.
 47. See Chomsky (1988: 185) for a qualification.
 48. For Chomsky there is a clear demarcation between the state and the government. Chomsky asserts that the state comprises institutions that set the conditions for public policy and is relatively stable. The state constitutes the 'actual nexus of decision-making power . . . including investment and political decisions, setting the framework within which the public policy can be discussed and is determined' (Chomsky, 1985: 230). In contrast, Chomsky views government as more visible, consisting of 'whatever groups happen to control the political system, one component of the state system, at a particular moment' (Chomsky, 1985: 230).
 49. As noted above, Chomsky clearly distinguishes the state from the government. The PM would explain hegemonic crises or shifts in political alignment, i.e. the massive defeat of the post-Mulroney Tories, in this context. Government is a visible and inherently transitory organ of the state. In contrast, the state, which Chomsky identifies as the actual nexus of decision-making power in the society, is remarkably stable in comparison.
 50. Chomsky (1992a: 380) finds the term 'alternative media' to be 'demeaning'. Chomsky regards such channels as listener-supported radio and independent journals as *independent media* and believes such media can encourage community involvement and opposition to propaganda by helping individuals gain access to information that is routinely filtered out by the mass media. 'You hear something different and you can think about things other than what you hear in the mainstream indoctrination system' (Chomsky, 1988: 743).
 51. See Herman (1996a, 2000) for a detailed discussion of the enhanced relevancy of the PM.

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